

The Census Project

The Census Project's Fiscal Year 2022 Funding Recommendation for the Census Bureau

The Census Project recommends that the Census Bureau receive **\$2 billion in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, which represents a \$335 million increase over the agency's FY 2021 funding level of \$1.65 billion.** (The FY 2021 figure includes a \$1.1 billion direct appropriation and carry-over funding that Congress authorized the Bureau to spend in FY 2021, if necessary, in support of 2020 Census activities). There are compelling reasons for providing the Census Bureau with such a significant funding increase in FY 2022, and to justify deviating from the usual decennial census pattern in which the agency's overall funding decreases between years ending in 1 and 2 after a decennial census.

After a decade in which the Census Bureau received inconsistent and delayed funding, had to curtail essential research and testing of operations, and experienced significant pandemic-related disruptions, investments are needed to not only help the agency recover, but to also help it improve the collection and delivery of official statistics for the nation. A modest increase in funding in FY 2022 could help the Census Bureau recover from years of postponed enhancements, sustain and strengthen its mission, and pursue numerous necessary operational innovations, including those outlined below. In March 2021, GAO kept the Census on its list of "High Risk" government operations, in part due to these factors.

These efforts are intended to provide the public and private sectors with more robust, granular and timely data for decision-making. **The Census Project supports efforts in Congress to provide the Bureau with greater authority for multi-year funding, beginning in FY 2022, to strengthen the innovations necessary to consolidate and integrate legacy surveys and systems into a new, more nimble data collection and dissemination model.**

Produce Accurate 2020 Census Data

Delays to the 2020 calendar driven by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have pushed 2020 data quality and reporting activities potentially into the next fiscal year. Operations necessary to produce and disseminate the Apportionment counts, redistricting data products, and downstream detailed census files have shifted when funding is required to later in the decennial cycle than is typical. The Bureau has already acknowledged that delays in the release of apportionment and redistricting data are forcing the Bureau to postpone the delivery of subsequent 2020 Census data products, including the Demographic Profile, Demographic & Housing Characteristics File, Congressional District Demographic and Housing Characteristics File, and Population and Housing Tables, into FY 2022. The delay of these 2020 Census products

means the Bureau will very likely need additional funding in FY 2022 to complete all operations and data delivery associated with the 2020 Census.

Launch the 2022 Economic Census

The Economic Census of 2022 is rapidly approaching and may be even more vital than normal as the nation seeks to understand and recover from the current economic crisis. The Census Bureau is being asked to **expand and enhance annual data on business formation and the number and size of business, especially those in underserved communities**. In addition, the Bureau seeks to **modernize its processes to lessen respondent burden, improve accuracy, and speed the delivery of important economic data** – a transformation that requires added resources.

Year “2” usually brings increased spending on the Economic Census. For example, in FY 2012, the Bureau proposed spending an additional \$12.6 million (an 11 percent increase over FY 2011) to support that phase of the 2012 Economic Census. **Increased spending for the 2022 Economic Census is expected** and can be accommodated in The Census Project’s proposed FY 2022 funding recommendation.

Fund New Survey Innovations

(1) Modernize the Bureau’s data infrastructure--The Census Bureau needs to harness currently-available Big Data technology and methodology to reduce respondent burden and realign the Bureau's already-existing data from multiple sources into universal "frames." The Bureau has numerous overlapping samples and products used by programs for different purposes, leading to inefficiencies, redundancies, and duplication. The Census Frames initiative will allow for more nimble operations across the enterprise, producing more granular and timely insights on people, places, jobs, or businesses. This initiative, consistent with the recommendations of the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking and utilizing authority granted by the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-435), will integrate data for streamlined use by all Census Bureau surveys, censuses, and products. **A significant increase in funding for the Census Frames initiative**, which was only funded at about \$12.7 million in FY 2021, will allow the Census Bureau to reduce duplication, increase ease and usability of federal statistical data, enhance the quality of Bureau products, facilitate analysis of the U.S. population and economy, and ensure that the federal government can utilize administrative data to maximum advantage before burdening survey respondents.

(2) Enhance the American Community Survey (ACS)--Early indications from the evaluation of 2020 Census data suggest that the disruptions to operations driven by COVID-19 will yield some geographic differences in data quality, such as in college and university towns and areas impacted by hurricanes, wildfires, and other natural emergencies, even as the historic differential undercount persists. States and localities especially cannot afford to wait another ten years to remedy such potential shortcomings in the 2020 count. The Census Bureau needs the flexibility to combine data sources with the ACS, the ongoing survey that replaced the “long

form” of the Census in 2005 which provides consistent, timely and accurate data about the nation’s changing socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, to produce more timely granular data for a significant number of geographies and sub-populations than achievable from the current ACS 5-year estimates. This would provide communities more timely data to fill in any gaps in the 2020 results. The ACS (which includes approximately 3.5 million households a year) has not been expanded since 2011, nor has its capability for more advanced modeling.

Because ACS data “is especially important to small towns and rural areas across the country,” the Appropriations Committees [directed](#) the Census Bureau in FY 2021 to “ensure that rural areas are covered with the same accuracy as urban areas to the maximum extent practicable.” Authorizing these enhancements and increasing the sample size are the most feasible avenues for meeting that goal, since most rural and remote areas can only produce reliable ACS data by estimating across the most recent five years of data. ACS data are an invaluable resource that data users, state and local governments, planners, and businesses rely on throughout the decade to make key investment and policy decisions as well as to conduct research and evaluate programs. The Bureau also needs to continue to use the ACS “as a testbed for innovative survey and data processing techniques,” as Congress directed in FY 2021. Funding for the ACS has remained relatively stagnant in recent years, including a little over \$226 million in FY 2021. The Bureau needs additional funding (no less than \$45 million to increase the sample size by at least 1 million households) to properly plan and execute an expansion of the ACS, beginning in FY 2022.

(3) Stabilize and increase funding for Survey of Income and Program Participation--After multiple COVID-19 relief bills, policymakers need to understand how the individual provisions in these supplemental appropriations measures assisted (or failed to assist) families and communities. The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) is designed to achieve that goal, yet its funding has fluctuated routinely, especially during years in which the government has been funded via a series of continuing resolutions. **Stabilizing and increasing support for SIPP**, to no less than \$48 million in FY 2022, will help Congress make evidence-based policy decisions on the effectiveness of government assistance programs.

(4) Extend Pulse Surveys--The Bureau’s “Pulse Surveys” have provided timely data regarding the economic, social, and health effects of COVID-19 on U.S. communities and businesses. The surveys have attracted support from other federal agencies that have requested to add questions and collaborated with the Census Bureau to produce the surveys. The Census Bureau needs no less than \$6 million in FY 2022 to sustain and expand this innovation that provides much more timely data on current economic and social issues. This is the kind of rapid-response insights production that could readily result in the future as the Frames initiative matures.

Prepare for 2030 Census

Planning for the 2030 Census has already begun, but it has also been delayed by the disrupted 2020 schedule. The Census Bureau requires increased staffing to understand and implement lessons from 2020 and to design experiments and test new innovations for 2030 during the

middle of the decade. These efforts require a great deal of engagement with Census stakeholders. To achieve these ambitious objectives, funding for 2030 Census preparations should be increased in FY 2022 to ensure staff have sufficient resources to evaluate the outcome of the 2020 Census, initiate preparations for the 2030 Census, improve the quality and integration of administrative data, maintain relationships with local and regional partners, and launch new initiatives (such as establishing a 2030 Census Advisory Committee). These early decade funding increases will allow the bureau to sustain critical capabilities and, as a result, reduce the risk of and funding needs for the program in the peak years later in the decade.

The Census Project (<https://thecensusproject.org>) is a broad-based coalition of national, state, and local organizations and companies that support an inclusive and accurate 2020 Census, 2030 Census, and American Community Survey (ACS) (the modern version of the census “long form”). Its 900+ member organizations and companies, representing the private, public, non-profit, and academic sectors, rely on objective data that the Census Bureau produces to inform evidence-based investment, policy and planning decisions.